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ABSTRACT

The Committee on Public Information was created by President Woodrow Wilson in 1917 and charged with informing the public about the war in Europe. Under the leadership of newspaper publisher George Creel, the Committee undertook a vigorous campaign that included censorship of government press releases; the production of posters, films, and patriotic advertising; the release of pamphlets and newspapers; and the introduction of a national speaking program. Speech teachers played an active role in this latter program. Through an organization called the "Four-Minute Men," they volunteered their expertise and delivered speeches across the nation explaining the draft, urging the purchase of bonds, stressing the necessity of supporting the Red Cross, and explaining why the country was at war. In addition, these teachers helped to train other speakers for the program. The Four-Minute Men used emotive rather than factual appeals, and usually relied on a personal approach to establish rapport with their audiences. The work of the Committee helped to undermine freedom of the press and intellectual freedom, and it is disappointing that the speech discipline has paid so little attention to its role in this endeavor. (FL)

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Propagandizing in the Interest of War: A Rhetorical Study of the Committee on Public Information

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Propagandizing in the Interest of War:

A Rhetorical Study of the

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On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson--elected on a peace platform--went before the Congress to call for a declaration of war. Four days later, the Congress, with few dissenting votes, obliged the President and declared war on the German Empire. The United States was determined to engage troops in the European war which had been raging for almost three years.

Anxious to assure public support for the war, President Wilson signed Executive Order #2594 creating the Committee on Public Information (CPI) within a week of the formal declaration of hostilities. The stated purpose of the CPI was to handle government news.[1] The CPI's actual task went beyond controlling the flow of information by acting as a press office for the government, however, and included the devolopment of a campaign to encourage war readiness. Wilson selected one of his most vocal supporters, Kansas City newspaper publisher George Creel, to head the new agency. In an attempt to increase the credibility of the Committee, and to assure that the information program represented a coordinated rather than fragmented effort, Wilson appointed the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of War to the Board of Directors of the CPI.[2]

Because the American people were not united in their support for the war, the Creel Committee--as it soon came to be called--was extremely important to Wilson's administration. The battles were, after all, thousands of miles from American shores, and there were no certain signs that the United States was directly threatened. When Wilson only two months earlier had acted to sever diplomatic relations with Germany pacifist groups had sprung into action. Emergency Peace Federations appeared and petitions against the war flooded Congress.[3] The pacifists also claimed some very influential

spokespersons including: William Jennings Bryan, Robert M. LaFollette, George W. Norris, and James K. Vardaman.[4] As H.C. Peterson observed:

> It is quite often said that Americans entered the war with the greatest enthusiasm, but this was not true. The Eastern newspaper people, ministers, professors, and the upper classes throughout the country were, of course, strongly in favor of the move. But they had been partisan from the outset. On the other hand, among the common people who would have to fight the war, there was no rejoicing in spite of the fact that their sympathies were with the Allies.[5]

Creel, in his personal account of the CPI, argued that his agency represented "a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising."[6] Others took a more cynical view of the CPI. Peterson, for instance, declared that the Committee's goal was to whip the American people into an "active or even violent force of righteous wrath."[7]

From its beginning, the Creel Committee went directly to the people with messages which: encouraged military enlistments, stressed labor peace, sold war bonds, urged contributions to the Red Cross, and emphasized improvements in national productivity. The CPI also created a foreign sector charged with the development of messages for foreign consumption--messages which sought both a favorable judgment from neutral nations concerning American intervention and to break the enemy's spirit and will to fight.[8]

The Committee on Public Information thus represented a massive effort and a significant undertaking--getting the Wilson administration's messages out to millions of people both inside and outside the United States.[9] As Jacques Ellul observed: "During World War I we saw a combined use of the mass media for the first time; the application of publicity and advertising

methods to public affairs, and the search for the most effective psychological methods."[10]

Despite the CPI's importance as an instrument in forming public opinion, and despite the fact that it was perhaps the most blatant attempt ever devised by an American president to win public support for his policies, the Committee on Public Information has been given scant attention by rhetorical scholars. This essay describes the rhetorical strategies used by the Committee, accounts for their success, and illustrates how the public reacted to these messages. The essay also seeks to explain how the war rhetoric of this era shaped the American notions of the "just war" and consequently influenced the rhetoric of subsequent wars.

The Committee's Scope and Activities

Almost immediately after its creation the Committee on Public Information began developing a strategy to convince the American people to make the sacrifices required by a totalistic war. The Committee's foreign sector was simultaneously charged with convincing neutral nations that American intentions were honorable, and convincing the enemy that America was such a powerful force that their best alternative was surrender. While the work of the CPI's foreign sector was significant and should receive attention from rhetorical scholars, this essay is focused on the domestic efforts undertaken by the Committee.

The most immediate concern the Committee faced was to control press access to war information. While avowing no interest in playing the role of official censor, the CPI was the gatekeeper for almost all government information on the war. The CPI issued "voluntary" guidelines newspapers and magazines were to follow in reporting the war.[11] These guidelines were,

however, voluntary in name only, for any newspaper which violated them quickly found itself denied access to almost all official information. Thus, newspapers which were unwilling to "play the game" in accordance with the Creel Committee's rules found themselves severely handicapped in their ability to report much of the news available to their competitors.

Any newspaper which chose to flagrantly defy the Committee's guidelines also risked being referred to the Department of Justice and/or the Post Office Department for potential legal action under the Sedition Act of 1918.[12] While the Committee did not in the strictest sense act as a censor, it came as close to performing that function as any government agency in the United States has ever come. The press, or at least certain elements of the press, spoke out against these actions,[13] but for the most part the protests were carefully constructed and rather mild. The Nation, for instance, commented:

> That there are deep and underlying dangers in any control of the press is, of course, obvious. Let us suppose that this were a highly unpopular war, undertaken not on a high moral basis, but for sinister purposes, by an administration of a different caliber from that at Washington. Then the indirect control of the press could be worked in the interest of office holders against that of the people as a whole to the lasting injury of the country.[14]

As the furor over the war intensified, however, even these calm protests were drowned out in a wave of patriotic fervor.

The control over the press was only one aspect of the Creel Committee's campaign to insure support for the war. The Committee published its own newspaper, the Official Bulletin, which was available without charge at post offices and which adorned bulletin boards fronting general stores throughout

the country.[15] Not surprisingly, the Bulletin printed exactly the genre of stories the CPI thought the public should read, and because this was the government's official inside story of what was happening in far away Europe, and because the other elements of the press were not quick to contradict its stories, these accounts were widely accepted.

The campaign for the "hearts and minds" of America's citizenry was not left in the hands of bungling bureaucrats. America's leading academicians willingly lent their support, and of course credibility, to the effort. Under the leadership of Dean Guy Stanton Ford, of the University of Minnesota, college professors were encouraged to write articles for CPI publications. These pamphlets resulted in a virtual avalanche of printed material explaining the American involvement in the war and condemning the actions of the enemy.[16] The professor's contributions were potent. Dr. Louis Gray, of the University of Nebraska, wrote:

> Ethically, the Prussian is a moral imbecile, an arrested development, a savage in civilization's garb, and even the garb he has stolen. Like the savage he is imitative not inventive. Like the savage he is boastful and cunning. Among the nations he is precisely what the type of moral imbecile but intellectually educated criminal is among individuals. . . . The war is but an episode in the age-long struggle between good and evil, between God and the Devil.[17]

Another professor, Dr. Vernon L. Kellogg, of Stanford University, declared that the Germans were lepers:

> Will it be any wonder if, after the war, the people of the world, when they recognize any human being as a German will shrink aside so that they may not touch him as he passes, or stoop for stones to drive him from their path? This will be cruel to the few who

> are not diseased but it will be warranted precaution against the danger--most of the Germans in Germany, and some outside of it, have become unclean and will have to walk the world as a marked people, avoided, despised, stoned. . . . Though it be war time or peace time, for a long time "German" and "made in Germany" are going to be equivalent, both as regards persons and things, as "unclean, unclean."[18]

As was intended, this rhetoric deeply stirred the passions of the American citizenry.

Members of the Speech discipline readily volunteered their expertise and became closely connected with the CPI through the "Four-Minute Men Organization," a group which solicited volunteer speakers for the war effort. The volunteers spoke in movie theatres, at public meetings, before dances, etc., and gave short three or four minute talks explaining the draft, urging the purchase of Liberty Bonds, stressing support for the Red Cross, reminding people to conserve food and materials, and explaining why the United States was at war.[19] Speech teachers helped train these speakers and were proud to play a substantive role in the nation's war effort.[20] The speech teachers were especially useful in helping the speakers develop the substance and style of their messages and in helping them develop rapport with their audiences.[21]

The "Four-Minute Men" were very successful in getting their message out to Americans. As Jeanne Graham commented:

> Beginning with 1,500 volunteers, recruited mainly by Liberty Loan Committees, the Four-Minute Men devoted their first nationwide efforts to the first Liberty Loan. From May 22 to June 15, 1917, they urged the public to participate in the bond drive to raise $2,000,000,000. To the delight of the War Department and the

> Creel Committee the drive was oversubscribed 52 percent. After this initial success the government and theatre owners became more co-operative, and the number of volunteers increased.[22]

The Four-Minute Men were urged to use emotive rather than primarily factual appeals. The primary strategy was to use a personal approach to establish rapport with the audience. To that end statements like, "While you eat others starve--what are you doing to help them?" were commonly used. The program sought "homespun" speakers who resembled their audiences rather than flashy speakers.[23]

The Four-Minute Men were encouraged to use official atrocity stories to stir public response. The following example was taken from an actual speech:

> Prussian "Schrecklichkeit" (the deliberate policy of terrorism) leads to almost unbelievable besotten brutality. The German soldiers--their letters were reprinted--were often forced against their wills, they themselves weeping, to carry out unspeakable orders against defenseless old men, women, and children, so that "respect" might grow for German "efficiency." For instance, at Dinant the wives and children of forty men were forced to witness the execution of their husbands and fathers.
>
> Now, then, do you want to take the slightest chance of meeting Prussianism here in America?
>
> If not, then you'll have to help in summoning all the resources of this country for the giant struggle. For resources will win the war.[24]

By the war's end some 75,000 Four-Minute Men had delivered 755,190 speeches.[25]

The Committee also developed a "Junior Four-Minute Men Program" aimed at gaining access to classrooms. Along with the speeches the children were given leaflets which appealed not only for their pennies (for the purchase of war bonds), but also through the children to their parents.[26]

The public was deeply involved in the Liberty Bond drives. Local communities were given subscription quotas in order to provide incentive. Communities which oversubscribed their quotas were given flags, which flew over their public buildings and infused the citizens with pride.[27]

The CPI also developed contests so that people could contribute slogans which might motivate others to purchase the bonds. Suggestions included: "Every Dollar Makes the Kaiser Holler;" "Do What's Right: Buy or Fight;" and, "A Man Who Won't Lend is the Kaiser's Friend."[28] The Liberty Bond drives were frequently oversubscribed, and were a source of great pride to the Creel Committee.

In yet another aspect of the CPI effort, some 18,000 newspapers and some 11,000 magazine issues donated advertising space to the Committee.[29] The advertisements supported the administration and encouraged public sacrifices. Often the ads were co-sponsored by private corporations eager to demonstrate their support for the war. The ads, once approved by the Committee, could carry the CPI's official logo and thus had the effect of closely aligning American business and industry with the war effort. One such advertisement, for instance, sponsored by the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, asked people if they would prefer to "invest" their money with Uncle Sam or have it "taken" by the Kaiser.[30] An ad in the Nation's Business called the Red Cross "The Greatest Mother in the World" and urged donations to the Fund for War Relief.[31] Another had the bold title: "Wanted! 3,000 Red-Blooded Men." The ad went on to explain:

> Men of the "skipped generation," men whose fathers were in the Civil War and whose sons are in this war--"regular fellows" of the in-between age, men who have made good in business, made good in times of peace, men whose success has come to them through knowing how to handle other men--three thousand of you are wanted [to serve as managers of YMCA huts for American soldiers in France].[32]

The Committee's advertisements were visually striking and appealing because the CPI had at its disposal some of the most talented advertising illustrators and cartoonists working at the time. Posters and billboards were also widely used to capture the public's attention.[33] One war bond poster showed a German soldier, with rifle and bayonnet in hand, hunched over a terrified mother holding an infant in her arms. The German, who is obviously ready to inflict some despicable act upon his innocent victims, is now being interrupted by an American soldier. The American is seen tapping the German on the shoulder so he can turn around to engage his enemy in a fair, face-to-face fight. The point is unmistakable. While the German would violate innocent victims, the Yank would not even attack this fiend without giving him a fair chance. The title of the poster, splashed across the top in bold letters: "Halt the Hun!"[34]

While these advertisements, posters, newspaper articles, and speeches all had an impact on how the American people viewed the war, it was the CPI Film Division which probably was the most powerful. Films had only recently appeared on the scene and they attracted wide attention from their somewhat naive and information-hungry viewers, for only films could create images which seemed real. The CPI not only produced its own films, but it helped independent producers market their films when they were deemed appropriate to the

Committee's mission. The films had several messages, including the importance of preparedness, the need for labor and racial peace, etc., but the most popular and influential films were the "hate" pictures which glorified the actions of American soldiers and illustrated the tremendous cruelty and immorality of the enemy.

The most popular of all films, as measured by box office success and critical acclaim, was entitled, "The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin." The plot traced the story of a peace-loving blacksmith in Belgium who was dragged into the war when his town was invaded. A German soldier attempts to violate his daughter and, though wounded himself, he summons the strength to save her. Other scenes in the film showed the commander of the submarine which sank the Lusitania receiving a decoration, and the Kaiser exclaiming that he will stand for "no nonsense" from America after the war. The movie did have a happy ending though, as it looked ahead to the end of the war--a scene where the Allies are victorious, the Kaiser is captured, and the blacksmith becomes his jailer completes the film.[35]

As an illustration of the impact of the film, when it played in Omaha fourteen thousand people saw it in its first week, the largest number ever to see a picture in so short a time in that city. The public response was intense; the Kaiser was hung in effigy and patriotic societies advertised that all pro-Germans would be admitted without charge. Not surprisingly, none accepted the invitation.[36]

One of the primary concerns of the Committee on Public Information was making people aware that German spies and saboteurs might be in their very midst. The Committee thus encouraged Americans to be wary of strangers, especially those with foreign accents, not to discuss or gossip about the war, and not to tell their neighbors pessimistic stories that might discourage them. A display

ad published in the Literary Digest, entitled "Spies and Lies" warned:

> German agents are everywhere, eager to gather scraps of news about our men, our ships, our munitions. It is still possible to get such information through to Germany, where thousands of these fragments--often individually harmless--are patiently pieced together into a whole which spells death to American soldiers and danger to American homes. . . .
>
> And do not wait until you catch someone putting a bomb under a factory. Report the man who spreads pessimistic stories, divulges--or seeks--confidential military information, cries for peace or belittles our efforts to win the war. . . .
>
> You are in contact with the enemy today, just as truly as if you faced him across No Man's Land. In your hands are two powerful weapons with which to meet him--discretion and vigilance. Use them.[37]

Creel was extremely pleased with the Committee's success in making the public aware of the threat of spies in their midst. He declared:

> Never was a country so thoroughly contra-espionaged! Not a pin dropped in the home of anyone with a foreign name but that it rang like thunder on the inner ear of some listening seluth! And with what result?
>
> A scientific system of registration, prescribed by law, revealed that there were about five hundred thousand German "enemy aliens" living in the United States, and three to four million "Austro-Hungarian enemy aliens." These figures as a matter of course, did not include the millions of naturalized citizens, or the

> sons and daughters of such millions. Out of this large number just six thousand were adjudged sufficiently disaffected to be detained under presidential warrants! Even a percentage of these, as a matter of common sense and justice were eventually released from army internment camps under a strict parole system.[38]

The Committee thus succeeded in making the Americans vigilant so they were ready to turn in their neighbors at the slightest indication that they might not be loyal Americans.

The Committee on Public Information thus marshalled all of the mass media tools available in this era to secure public support for the war and to inform the American people that this was a total confrontation which pitted the forces of good against the forces of evil.

The Public Responds to the War Rhetoric

Public support for the war greatly increased in the days following the formal declaration of hostilities. While it would be foolish to claim that the Committee on Public Information was the sole cause for the dramatic groundswell of support for the war, the Committee did have a great deal of impact. Prior to the declaration of war, Americans were divided on the question of whether the United States should join the Allies. Soon, however, the resistance had weakened and emotions were so intense that the opponents of the war dared not speak. Even a member of the United States Senate was unable to freely state an opinion if it was not supportive of the war. In a speech in St. Paul, Minnesota, Senator Robert LaFollette debunked the commonly held notion that the sinking of the Lusitania warranted an American declaration of war:

> A passenger on a foreign ship carrying munitions is technically in a foreign territory. I was not in favor of beginning this war.

> We had no grievance. The German Government had interfered with our rights to travel on the high seas--as passengers on munitions-ships of Great Britain. On these grievances, which were insignificant, considering the rights and consequences involved, we went to war.[39]

The protests to LaFollette's speech were immediate and vitriolic. The St. Paul Pioneer Press thought LaFollette should be treated no differently from the "soap-box orators who are being arrested in so many cities."[40] The Minneapolis Tribune said the speech was "more disloyal, more treasonable, than the utterances that have landed lesser pro-Germans in prison and sent them into internment."[41] The Duluth Herald declared it "a shame to America, a shame to Wisconsin, that the Senate of the United States must harbor a defender of the child-murderers who sank the Lusitania."[42] Former President Theodore Roosevelt declared:

> Senator LaFollette is at this moment loyally and efficiently serving one country--Germany. He is acting in such a fashion as to make him one of the most potent enemies of this country and a most sinsister enemy of democracy. He claims, and it is the emptiest claim, to stand for democracy. He is doing everything in his power to enthrone autocracy under the German flag throughout the world by the attitude he is taking toward the war. He is showing himself the worst enemy that democracy has now alive.[43]

The Senate debated a resolution to expel LaFollette for his remarks, but it never came up for a vote. The Senator protested that his freedom of speech was at stake, but the Detroit Free Press seemed to speak for a majority of patriotic Americans when it observed that LaFollette had an inability to "distinguish employment of free speech and employment of seditious speech."[44] As a consequence of this general hysteria for war, it became possible only for war hawks to speak without restraint.[45]

The success of the Creel Committee's propaganda was demonstrated in several ways. Some of the examples mentioned earlier provide sign evidence that the Committee gained public support for the war. The sale of Liberty Bonds, the popularity of CPI sponsored films, and the number of people volunteering to participate in the Committee's projects all illustrate that the public attended to these messages.

Perhaps an even better illustration of how the rhetoric influenced Americans is the treatment of German immigrants in the United States. As already mentioned, one important aspect of the Committee's rhetorical campaign was to convince the American people that enemy spies and saboteurs were in their midst. The enemy was cast as despicable, guilty of the most heinous crimes imaginable, a sub-human willing to torture men, women, and children. The public reacted to this rhetoric with a vengeance. Defense councils, security leagues, and defense societies sprang up in states and localities throughout the nation.[46] The councils were encouraged as a means by which people could protect themselves from these terrible enemies who were both inside and outside of our country. The councils also helped sell the Liberty Bonds, and the purchase of the bonds became a litmus test for patriotism.

German-Americans were especially targeted by these groups. As George Sylvester Viereck wrote: "At times the methods used smacked of extortion. If men refused to buy bonds, their houses were painted yellow, and they themselves were subjected to insult and violence. It was a mild form of terrorism."[47]

In some cases the terrorism was by no means mild. The New York Times routinely reported the following from Pottsville, Pennsylvania:

> Five Austrians who refused to purchase Liberty Bonds were taken by the heels by the workmen and dipped into a steel tank used for heating oil. . . . Threats to sue the ring leaders of the crowd brought the statement that a suit would result in the Austrians being strung up. The men all purchased bonds today.[48]

Even pacifistic religious groups were subjected to similar acts of terrorism, again from the New York Times:

> When an unconfirmed rumor was received that members of a Mennonite colony at Jamesville [SD]. . . had refused to buy Liberty Bonds, officers in charge of the loan campaign visited the colony and drove away 100 head of steers and 1,000 sheep.
>
> In a statement issued subsequently it was said the animals would be sold and the money invested in Liberty Bonds and applied to the Jamesville quota. The Mennonites offered no opposition to the Bond "salesmen."[49]

In the most violent attack of this type, a mob of pro-war patriots in Collinsville, Illinois, lynched a German immigrant who was suspected of disloyalty. Robert Prager, a barely literate coal miner was killed because the mob believed he was hoarding explosives and planning to sabotage the mine in which he worked. As the rope was placed around his neck he was said to have proclaimed his loyalty to America. No explosives were ever found.[50]

It was not only the German-Americans who suffered, even their language was attacked. The College of the City University of New York reduced by one credit every course in the Department of German.[51] In the West and Midwest, where the largest German population had settled, the reaction was even more intense; fourteen states passed laws forbidding the use of the German language in public schools.[52] Not satisfied that these laws went far enough, the Governor of Iowa proclaimed the following regulations:

> First--English should and must be the only medium of instruction in public, private, denominational, or other similar schools.
>
> Second--Conversation in public places, on trains, or over the telephone, should be in the English language.

> Third--All public addresses should be in the English language.
>
> Fourth--Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their religious worship in their homes.[53]

While Creel conceded that some of these regulations were extreme, he applauded their intent declaring: "There can be no denial of the evil that was attempted to be cured. In our schools, our churches, our press, and in our social life, English should be the one accepted language and this must of necessity be our goal."[54]

Thus, the public reacted to the Committee's rhetoric as one might expect they would. The government declared the enemy the evil incarnate and further declared that he was in the people's very midst, in towns, villages, and the cities of our nation. Furthermore, those members of the press or those political figures who might believe differently were inhibited from speaking out. There were no contradictory rhetorical messages adequate to impinge upon the Committee's rhetorical explanation. The public acted as one might expect it would. Unfortunately, the hostilities broadened even beyond the German immigrants:

> Propaganda did help sell bonds, combat absenteeism, reconcile some doubters to the war; but the price for this was large. . . . As their emotionalism grew, it was easily turned by clever men against Negroes, immigrants, even suffragettes, against all the objects of chronic American prejudices. The terror, before it subsided, reached heights unrivalled until the 1950s.[55]

The Rhetorical Implications of the CPI

Kenneth Burke, in his essay "War and Cultural Life," which was published during the second world war noted:

> War, when fought under conditions of totality, obviously requires the enlistment of art, of horatory or admonitory rhetoric, of information presented in ways that cushion the discouragement of defeats or intensify the encouragement of victories, and of such identification between the leaders and the led as attains its natural fulfillment in a swing back from debunking to heroism (that is from an attitude of individualist rejection to one of group identification).[56]

A more apt description of the role of the Committee on Public Information could probably not have been created. The CPI was effective because it mobilized the resources of the press, artists, motion picture producers, academics, etc. into a systematic campaign which offered consistent and credible explanations for the events in far away Europe. The control of the press, the discouragement of any expression of dissent, the positive characterizations of American motives contrasted with the negative characterizations of the enemy's motives, the involvement of all citizens in the bond drives as soldiers on the home front--all these actions helped create a frame of acceptance for the war.

This frame of acceptance depended upon the development and salience of the American conception that this was a just cause for war. The European involvement was deemed just because the "goodness" of America was pitted against the evil of the Kaiser's Germany. America was not fighting for territorial gain nor for selfish motives, but rather in the pursuit of some greater and more "pure" values. The CPI rhetoric pitted the savior against the aggressor; the liberator against the tyrant; the citizen-soldier against the cruel murderer. From this rhetoric came some fairly specific notions of the American concept of the "just" war doctine. These notions remain with us today. As Robert Tucker argued:

> There is an apparent simplicity about the American doctrine of the just war that readily lends itself to caricature. Undoubtedly the most striking characteristic of this doctrine is its simplicity. The American doctrine is distinguished by the assumption that the use of force is clearly governed by universally valid moral and legal standards. . . . In substance, the just war is the war fought either in self-defense or in collective defense against an armed attack. Conversely, the unjust--and of course, the unlawful--war is the war initiated in circumstances other than those of self-defense against armed aggressors.[57]

The American notion of the just war has conditioned Americans to recognize the symbolic motives which must properly accompany the call to battle. Robert Ivie, in his examination of Presidential rhetoric across several wars found a distinctive symbolic pattern:

> The synthesized vocabulary, in sum, contains the motives in a definite hierarchy with "rights" at the pinnacle, as the primary god-term for purpose, and with "law" and "democracy" as secondary god-terms for agency. Only through the agencies of law and democracy can rights such as "freedom" be made secure.[58]

This vocabulary of motives was clearly present in the rhetoric created by the Committee on Public Information. Americans were motivated to support the war in Europe because they were convinced that American involvement was directly warranted by the enemy's horrific acts of violence inflicted upon the innocent people of Belgium, the innocent people on the Lusitania, and the fear that America was itself directly threatened by these acts of wanton violence.

Conclusion

It is somehow unsettling even to contemplate the permanent stain left on our nation's history, and to the principle of a free press and a marketplace of ideas by the actions of the Committee on Public Information. The scenario of a government deeply involved in such an overt campaign to assure uniformity of thought and to stamp out dissent smacks of an Orwellian nightmare. It is even more frightening to contemplate the kind of actions today's "imperial presidency" could invoke under similar circumstances.

It is also disappointing that our discipline, which has always espoused commitment to freedom of speech and thought has given so little attention to the Committee on Public Information. And what is worse, that those articles which have appeared have praised the Committee for its effectiveness and applauded the discipline's contribution to that end. Those trained in public arguments ought to demonstrate more sensitivity to the means-ends dichotomy than was demonstrated by the scholars of this period and most of those who have commented on this period.

A most prophetic article appeared in the New Republic published on October 6, 1917:

> How is it possible to pretend that a war conducted in such a spirit can make for enduring peace? It is this headstrong and vindictive state of mind, this easy confusion of blind pugnacity with the sense of absolute rightness which has always been and will always be the most fruitful mother of wars. As a matter of fact, the people who are now laboring to infect American public opinion with their own virulence always have been and still are the enemies rather than the friends of lasting peace.[59]

It seems the editorialist's position was borne out, for this same sense of moral righteousness has since characterized most American war rhetoric,[60] and at the very least we know that the "War to End all Wars" did not.

Notes

[1]James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), p. 49.

[2]Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Techniques in the World War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 18.

[3]H.C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, Opponents of War, 1917-1918 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1957), p. 3.

[4]Peterson and Fite, pp. 4-5.

[5]H.C. Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 322.

[6]George Creel, How We Advertised America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1920), pp. 4-5.

[7]Peterson, p. 325.

[8]George C. Bruntz, Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918 (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1938), pp. 30-40.

[9]Mock and Larson, pp. 6-7.

[10]Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 232-33.

[11]Mock and Larson, pp. 6-7.

[12]For an interesting and timely discussion of the Sedition Act see: "Stronger Curb on Enemies at Home," Literary Digest, 4 May 1918, p. 19.

[13]Mock and Larson, pp. 31-32.

[14]"The Government's Control of the Press," The Nation, 13 September 1917, p. 283.

[15]Mock and Larson, p. 7.

[16]Mock and Larson, pp. 166-73.

[17]Louis Gray, cited in George Sylvester Viereck, Spreading Germs of Hate (New York: Horace Liveright, 1930), pp. 189-90.

[18]Vernon L. Kellogg, cited in Viereck, p. 190.

[19]Cedric Larson and James Mock, "The Four-Minute Men," Quarterly Journal of Speech 25 (1939): 97-112. A list of topics can be found on page 101.

[20]For a brief discussion of the role of Speech faculty members in the "Four-Minute Men Program" see: Glenn N. Merry, "National Defense and Public Speaking," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education 4 (January 1918): 58-59.

[21]B.C. VanWye, "Speech Training for Patriotic Service," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education 4 (October 1918): 368-69.

[22]Jeanne Graham, "The Four-Minute Men: Volunteers for Propaganda," Southern Speech Journal 32 (Fall 1966), p. 50.

[23]Graham, pp. 54-55.

[24]Mock and Larson, p. 123.

[25]Viereck, p. 179.

[26]Mock and Larson, p. 7.

[27]New York Times, 7 April 1918, p. 2:1.

[28]"The Liberty Phrase Makers," New York Times, 5 May 1918, p. 8:2.

[29]Viereck, pp. 178-79.

[30]The Literary Digest, 13 April 1918, p. 42.

[31]Nation's Business, May, 1918, p. 89.

[32]Nation's Business, September, 1918, p. 32.

[33]Mock and Larson, pp. 96-112.

[34]Mock and Larson, p. 65.

[35]Mock and Larson, p. 152.

[36]Mock and Larson, p. 152.

[37]The Literary Digest, 8 June 1918, pp. 48-49.

[38]Creel, p. 168.

[39]Cited in "LaFollette as a Foe of Democracy," Literary Digest, 6 October 1917, p. 15.

[40]St. Paul Pioneer Press, cited by Peterson and Fite, p. 69.

[41]Minneapolis Tribune, cited by Peterson and Fite, p. 69.

[42]Duluth Herald, cited in "LaFollette as a Foe of Democracy," p. 15.

[43]Theodore Roosevelt, cited in "LaFollette as a Foe of Democracy," p. 15.

[44]Detroit Free Press, cited in "The Limits of Free Speech," Literary Digest, 20 October 1917, p. 11.

[45]H.C. Peterson, p. 322.

[46]Among the many semi-official and private organizations established to assure public loyalty were: the American Defense Society, the National Security League, the American Protective League, the Home Defense League, the Liberty League, the Kights of Liberty, the American Rights League, the American Anti-Anarchy Association, the Boy Spies of America, and the Terrible Threateners. For a discussion of these groups see: Peterson and Fite, p. 18.

[47]Viereck, p. 184.

[48]New York Times, 19 April 1918, p. 15:3.

[49]"Sieze Livestock for Loan," New York Times, 6 May 1918, p. 6:2.

[50]For a discussion of the lynching see: "The First War-Lynching," The Literary Digest, 20 April 1918, p. 16.

[51]Viereck, p. 187.

[52]Viereck, pp. 187-88.

[53]Creel, p. 174.

[54]Creel, p. 174.

[55]John M. Blum, Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1956), p. 142.

[56]Kenneth Burke, "War and Cultural Life," American Journal of Sociology 48 (November 1942), p. 406.

[57]Robert W. Tucker, The Just War: A Study in Contemporary American Doctrine (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1960), p. 11.

[58]Robert L. Ivie, "Presidential Motives for War," Quarterly Journal of Speech 60 October 1974), p. 340.

[59]"War Propaganda," The New Republic, 6 October 1917, pp. 256-57.

[60]Both Ivie and Tucker offer very informative comparisons of the war rhetoric generated by American political leaders during different military conflicts.